

N. S. JANASHIA: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE ABKHASIANS 125

The Megrelians also know this septenary, *shk'vit'-ul-i*, in honour of which the majority of families let loose a cow with a pierced ear. Her milk is not used for food. The bullock is offered in sacrifice, while the heifer is reared. The well-known Pshav *Kviria* is, perhaps, related to Megrelian *Ayt'ar*. I have pointed out above that among the Megrelians the god of cattle-breeding is called *Zhini Ant'ar*. *Ant'ar* is the Abkhasian *Ayt'ar*, while *zhini*, in Megrelian, "high," "heavenly," is equivalent to Abkhasian *khikh*. The Abkhasians, however, appear to have split up *Zhini Ant'ar* into two gods, *Ayt'ar* and *Khikh*. They appeal for help to the latter in the spring, when the cattle are taken to the mountain pastures. They pray to him under the shadows of trees. On four pillarets are placed poles, which are covered with leaves of trees, particularly of the wild hazel tree, the oak, or yoke-elm. A cheese curd wrapped in chestnut tree bark is placed on this table (*ashwamkydt'*)* which is covered with greenery; on it is also placed *atchamah'wa*, a kind of millet porridge, cooked with cheese. In front of it is also placed milk gruel. Women are not allowed to be present. The head of the family, standing with uncovered head in front of this green table, called *ashwamkydt'*, prays that *Khikh*, the great part of the great deity *Ayt'ar*, may increase his cattle and send all good things. While praying he spills a little of the gruel towards the sea and towards the mountains, uttering *wootsw*. The prayer over, he takes the cheese curd and passes over it cross-wise a hazel "knife", which is really a stick cut into a tapering, knife-like shape, after which he actually cuts the cheese curd with a real knife.¹ This ceremony of prayer is followed by a dinner, the remains of which are not cleared away. Three of the supports or legs of *ashwamkydt'* are cut off (each with one stroke), the fourth remains there untouched. It seems to me probable that the table itself received its name from this act of cutting. Megrelians also know this *ashwamkydt'*, which they call *sumket* (*sumi keti*), "three sticks," derived, perhaps, from *sumkva'*, in which case it would denote "three cuttings" (*hvat' < avat'us* = to cut, to fell), i.e. "cut with three strokes."²

The Georgian Mountaineers also have their *Anator-i*.

(c) *Alōshkintr* (*alōshkintr*).

These cakes are also put aside. The prayer now takes three new

* The combination *shw* represents a labialized variety of "sh"; cf. "shw" p. 120, note *. In *ashwamkydt'* the "sh" is not only labialized, but also lingualized or lotized, which lingualization is not, however, represented in the transcription. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

¹ By using the wooden knife, the Abkhasian probably pays tribute to that very ancient time when his ancestors used that kind of knife.

² If the first part *shw* represents the Megrelian word "three", one should keep in mind not the "Kart'lianized" form *sumi*, but the original, Tsal-Kainian *shumi*; see Marr, *From the Journeys to Soanin* (in Russian), in *Krist. Vestnik*, II, pp. 17-18. (Editor, *Krist. Vestnik*.)